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9. SIGHTING OF LONG-EARED OWL (*ASIO OTUS*) IN BANNI REGION OF KACHCHH DISTRICT, GUJARAT, INDIA

The Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* is an uncommon winter visitor to India (Kazmierczak and Singh 1998). On January 17, 2000, we were surveying in the Andaui village of Banni region of Kachchh, Gujarat, close to the Greater Rann, for rare and endangered plants. Standing on a dry village pond, one of us (JJ) saw something that resembled a dead stump of a branch among the foliage of one of the *Acacia nilotica* trees. On a closer look, we found it to be a bird, and that too an owl.

The owl was brownish orange in colour, with heavy streaks on the breast, belly and flanks, and to some extent on the upper parts. It had long ear tufts with an orange brown facial disc and orangish brown eyes.

On scanning the other trees nearby, we spotted three more birds. They were perched on branches close to the main trunk. The average height of the trees was 3 m. The birds were perched between 1 m to 2.5 m from the ground, with dense cover on all sides. The canopy was very dense, as the branches of the trees had grown after the villagers had lopped them. These have probably given them adequate protection and cover from disturbance, especially from crows. We could approach the edge of the canopy (< 2m) without disturbing the birds.

The Long-eared Owl is listed in Appendix A in THE BIRDS OF KUTCH (Ali 1945). Ali has mentioned that sightings of this bird were reported from Kutch by Dr. F. Stolickza and A.O. Hume in the early 1870s, but the species was not spotted

during his survey.

This species has been reported to be a resident migrant, breeding in Baluchistan and Kashmir up to c. 2000 m and wintering in Pakistan and N. India (Ali and Ripley 1995). Grimmett *et al.* (1999) call the species a winter visitor to Pakistan and northwest India, also with records of breeding.

It was said to occur in the hilly forest in summer and grassy low-land jungle (Ali and Ripley 1995) and among stunted trees and popular plantations (Grimmett *et al.* 1999) in winter. Our sighting was in a small patch of *A. nilotica* forest, which had been severely topped, but had grown again into a thick closed canopy, located at the edge of the Rann in the once extensive Banni grasslands.

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